Paranoia and Puns

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/14016627.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationship:	Cedric Diggory/Harry Potter
Characters:	Cedric Diggory, Harry Potter
Additional Tags:	Fluff, puns, Bad Humor, Bad Flirting, Cedric doesn't know how to flirt or chill, he thinks he's so cool, harry would agree, Fix-it fic, paranoia will save us all, Don't copy to another site, Translation Available, Перевод на русский | Translation in Russian
Language:	English
Collections:	{ couples }, Hainako's Collection of amazing fanfiction, 5 Star HP Works, worth it, I love you so, Гедрик, harry is in a *relationship*, Reading is one form of escape. Running for your life is another., Psychologeek top picks, I wish I could read these for the first time, Works worth reading again and again, These Fics Deserve The World, Avidreaders HP completed faves, Harry Potter Stuff, Suggested Good Reads, Kinda interesting, fave f1cs 0h my G 0 D s, Other__Stuff, HP_favorite, Harry Cedric Fics, super_fics, passes MY vibe check!, SakurAlpha's Fic Rec of Pure how did you create this you amazing bean, Absolute favorites like “how do you create this?! How?!”, Se eu perde-las, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, C’s Favorite HP Fanfics, List of Harry Potter fanfics, my skin is clear my crops are flourishing my grades are up and its because of these fics, Comfort food with prizes (the prizes are angst caltrops), Talullah’s favorite HP fanfics, Cherry Lemonade will have spare time eventually!, ✯ Deliciously Forbidden ✯, ☆ Potterette's Neverland Treasure ☆, Favorite HP Fics, HP stories I could read a thousand times ⚡💚⚡, Into the rabbit hole, complete besties bastards beloved, stand-alone stories, Zen's favorite HP fics, Finished Fanfiction, the reason i'm an insomniac, Best Stories, Ajs hp boat, HP Reads for my sanity, Hermione4eva, better than hot chocolate on a winter day, Qqqqqq115, 10 Estrellas ¡Favorito!, Es un pequeño frijol dulce, If I could marry these fanfics I would, my harry potter favs
Stats:	Published: 2018-03-18 Completed: 2019-03-16 Words: 11,577 Chapters: 3/3

Paranoia and Puns

by You_Light_The_Sky

Summary

Harry makes three rules to survive fourth year: 1) watch the new DADA professor like a hawk, 2) suspect all animals of being animagi, and 3) avoid Cedric Diggory at all costs. Shame Diggory didn't get the memo.

For a tumblr prompt by johnlocked-starkid: maybe a Harry/Cedric thing where the Triwizard Cup isn’t a portkey and Voldemort doesn’t happen, and instead they just win together and are happy and celebrate together. (bonus points for shy confessions of a crush from one or the other)

Notes

I'm sorry but Cedric Diggory is now a dork who thinks puns are the key to a boy's heart. Goodbye world.

Russian translation here

In which Cedric is imperfect

Cedric Diggory makes Harry's heart pound for the first time when he visits him in the Hospital Wing and says, "I know nothing I can say will make this alright but… I wish I could have stopped those dementors from getting you… I just wish… I could do something to make this better."

Harry tries to ignore the fluttering in his chest, tries to wave off the concern by saying, "…It's fine. Dementors just seem to really like me for some reason…"

But Diggory just *has* to argue, just *has* to be noble and good.

"It's not fine!" he insists. "They're horrible! They should just quit-itch!"

At that moment, Harry only stares, wide-eyed. Diggory stops in mid-sentence, staring back, horrified.

"Did you just…"

"I didn't mean…"

"Oh my god, you *did*—"

Diggory takes back his horror, in favour for indignation.

"Well, you're *smiling*, so I win. Point one for Diggory."

"No way, that was horrible."

"I think you mean, I was *pun*ny." Diggory crosses his arms, looking so smug and imperfect that Harry bursts out laughing, the flutters threatening to break out into song.

Oh shit, Harry thinks, remembering this feeling with Cho. *Oh shit, no.*

::

By the end of third year, Harry decides he needs to do three things to have a chaos-free school year.

First, he's going to watch the new DADA professor like a *hawk*. The only decent teacher he had got fired, and Harry feels that if he had watched out for Lupin earlier on (those werewolf clues were pretty obvious in hindsight), he could have warned Lupin to stay put during the full moon. His other DADA professors, on the other hand, have all tried to kill him. So. *Watching the new DADA professor like a hawk*. One never knows who could be a fraud, possessed murderer, father-figure or two of the above. Any sign of murderous intent, and Harry will use plans A through P.

Second, suspect every animal he sees of being an animagus because *you never know*. (He already, guiltily, accused his beloved Hedwig of being such and she punished him suitably with bloodied fingers. Harry's head is now her permanent perch.) If he'd known Scabbers was traitorous scum earlier, his life would be better.

Third, avoid Cedric Diggory at all costs.

The last item on his list might seem ridiculous, but ever since Diggory came to visit Harry in the Hospital Wing after that game-that-shall-not-be-named, Harry can't look at Diggory without… *feelings*, in his stomach. Like dead butterflies trying to claw their way out his stomach feelings. Like wanting to look at Diggory and just *stare* feelings. Harry's walked into seven walls alone because he heard Diggory laugh. See? Evidence that Cedric Diggory plus Harry Potter equals disaster.

Does Diggory *have* to stop Harry in the corridor between classes just to throw another pun at him? No. Absolutely not. He's hiding something. Clearly.

It's bad enough that Harry gets distracted by Cho Chang, but adding the fact that Diggory is apparently sweet and funny and probably-too-good-to-be-true, Harry is just going to lock those feelings up in a box and throw away the key. The Wizarding World doesn't need to know that Harry chases blokes and girls just the same.

"There," Harry mutters, after obsessively writing his lists and reasons. "This good girl?" He lifts the scroll up for Hedwig to investigate from her throne of soft hair.

Hedwig just huffs, the equivalent of a snort, clearly too good for this conversation.

"Right, I'll just stick it in my robes as a daily reminder, yeah…"

::

"…What's this?" Hermione says in amusement when Harry gives Ron and her a copy of the List for Survival.

"I had a bad dream with Voldemort. Real traumatizing stuff. So I made a list. We're going to do everything on the list."

"Honestly Harry, aren't you being a tad bit paranoid?"

"Three teachers did try to kill him," Ron points out.

"Lupin was having his time of the month," Harry scowls, "he's not included on the List."

"Right, right, sorry," Ron raises his hands in surrender.

"*Avoid Cedric Diggory?*" Hermione mutters. "Really Harry? Diggory seems like a perfect gentleman—"

"*Exactly*," Harry says. "He's too nice."

“But—”

“Hermione,” Ron puts a hand on her shoulder, “Trust me on this one. Harry should *not* be left alone with Diggory. It becomes a disaster. And not the kind that you’re thinking. *Trust me*.”

Hermione and Ron share a *look*, before Hermione’s eyes go wide with understanding and she says, “*Oh*... the tripping incident.”

“Yup,” Ron replies, looking like a soldier returned from war. “The tripping incident.”

Harry scowls. “The tripping incident wasn’t *that* bad.”

::

The tripping incident was, indeed, that bad.

Harry had been happily enjoying his breakfast, fresh out of the hospital wing, when he started getting *flowers.* A school owl swooped in and chucked a fresh dandelion at him, mid-bite. Harry nearly choked on the petals, spitting them out all over his robes.

He stared down at the flower-weed-thing, the dandelion stared back. Then, the flower jumped up and whispered in his ear, ‘Isn’t it just *dandy* to be a lion out of the hospital wing?’

Harry knew immediately who it was.

He looked at the Hufflepuff table, and Diggory winked at him. “Point two to Diggory,” he had the audacity to mouth.

Harry’s face went red as he stood up, undecided about whether he was going to throw the flower back in Diggory’s perfect hair or obsessively preserve it in his textbooks, when he tripped on a stray petal, wrist flying at an unfortunately angle against the table, and ended up in the hospital wing again.

::

“Right…” Hermione murmurs, “we should probably keep him away from Diggory to prevent any accidents. At least until Diggory gets better at flirting.”

“He should get better at not indirectly hurting my mate,” Ron mutters.

“He’s not flirting! And he’s not *trying* to hurt me either.”

“I said *indirectly*.”

“I never said he was *good* at the flirting.”

Harry sighs. “Just… please respect The Rules this year guys. We need to be vigilant!”

“Especially for Rule Number Three, yes, we got it,” Ron nods.

::

Rule number three goes down the drain as soon as Diggory helps Harry stand up after the portkey.

“Sorry about my dad,” Diggory sighs, seeming embarrassed by the whole thing. “I kept telling him that I didn’t really win. There were *dementors,* it shouldn’t have counted. He doesn’t understand what you must have been through—”

“It’s fine,” Harry says, trying to decide if it would be impolite to just take his hand back. Diggory’s hands are so warm. They envelope Harry’s completely.

“It’s not—” Diggory pauses and narrows his eyes. “You like using those words too much. I should ban them.”

“Only if I get to ban puns.”

“*Rikiculous!*”

“Dementor puns now? That’s in bad taste,” Harry grins.

“*You* seem to eat them up just fine.”

“I’ll show you what I—”

“Bloody hell, please don’t finish that sentence,” Ron interrupts, glaring at them both. “Diggory, stand one foot away from my best mate *right now*.”

Harry wants to say that they aren’t that close but when he looks, he realizes that he and Diggory are just inches apart, hands still together. How, when, why.

Immediately, Harry bolts away. This is why he needs Rule Number Three. He clearly loses his mind around Diggory.

“Sorry,” he mutters, missing Diggory’s disappointed look. “I, uh, seeyoulater.”

Ron narrows his eyes and gives Diggory the *I’m watching you* look.

::

Diggory, of course, has to be perfect again and help the Weasleys pitch up their tent. Harry can’t even complain when Diggory seems lighter away from his father. Even Head Boys need a break from family. Harry knows all too well the faces family puts on for the public versus the home.

“Want some hot chocolate?” Diggory offers, holding two mugs.

“Oh, uh, no,” Harry says, remembering Rule Three.

“Darn. Do you not like chocolate? I thought you did…”

“Uh…”

“How *dairy* reject free chocolate?”

“…Diggory… *no*.”

“Cedric, yes,” he waggles his eyebrows.

“*Ohmygod*,” has Harry turned into a tomato yet? Can he join his brethren in the soil and come back out in September?

“I have a choco*lot* more where that came from,” he preens, looking damn pleased with himself.

“…Just give me the hot chocolate.”

Diggory hums triumphantly when he does.

“Rule number three,” Harry mutters, resisting the urge to do something stupid and Gryffindor.

“What?”

“I said put a lid on it.”

Diggory’s smile grows. “I like to keep my options *open*.”

…Right. Retreat. Retreat now.

“Oh no,” Harry drops the cup on himself, “I seem to have spilled hot chocolate on myself, I must go…”

Harry stumbles backwards into the Weasley tent, ignoring Diggory’s attempts to use a cleaning charm. He just barely misses tripping over Fred and George, both of whom are happy to distract Diggory thanks to a bribe from Ron.

Nailed it.

::

The last straw is in the Quidditch stands, when Diggory and his father show up because apparently everyone Harry knows is going to sit in this box. The Malfoys? Check. The Weasleys? Yup. Hermione? Always. Why not the person who violates Rule Number Three too? Why. Not.

“Harry, mate, come stand over here,” Ron says loudly, eager to help reinforce Rule Number Three. Bless him.

“No way, this is the best view. It’s ours now!” the twins rush in, taking up both of Ron’s sides. Damn them all.

“S’alright, Harry, you can come stand by me,” Diggory beams, patting the spot he saved by the ledge.

“Just talking to him this once won’t kill you,” Hermione whispers. “You can go back to your silly little Rules afterwards.” She pushes him forward.

Harry stumbles next to Diggory, trying to avoid eye contact with an awkward nod.

The wind brushes by them and Diggory huddles closer. “Can’t wait for the game,” he whispers excitedly. “Nothing like watching pros play.”

“…It’s the first Quidditch game I’ve ever watched,” Harry admits, when it’s clear that Diggory won’t take an awkward silence for an answer.

Diggory’s eyes widen. “Then we have to make this an experience to remember! You like sweets, right? Here,” he passes Harry some chocolate frogs, and a mini snitch pendant that says *Ireland vs. Bulgaria* against the wings. “For you!”

“Uh… aren’t these *your* souvenirs? I can’t just take them…”

“I insist,” Diggory brings the necklace over Harry’s head. “Besides, if you’re wearing this,” Diggory’s hand lingers on the snitch pendant, “it might make you easier to *catch* in the corridors when I want to test a new pun.”

Harry’s mouth drops, “*You*—”

The announcers begin the game before Harry can finish his words. Even the veela can’t distract Harry from the absurdly addicting way Cedric smiles when he thinks he’s being cool.

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The dark mark in the sky reminds Harry of the severity of the Rules he made this year.

He tells himself not to care when Cedric writes him a letter, asking if he’s alright. He tells himself he’s just being polite when he writes back *I’m Fine.*

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Stop saying you’re fine, Cedric writes back.

Stop sending me puns in the mail, Harry writes in return.

Owl I know you’re laughing then?

Harry doesn’t know what to say to that.

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At the Sorting Feast, Harry remembers Rule Number One and mutters to Hermione and Ron, “We should research everything there is to know about Mad-Eye Moody.”

"…Seriously mate? The guy's an *auror*. The ministry have probably done tons of background checks on him already. Besides, I thought your Rules were done after you started penpaling Diggory and Crookshanks tried to murder you for checking for his *humanity* again."

"We're not penpaling." Harry merely likes to discuss the elements of truly *good* humour. Discussion ongoing. "I just made an amendment to Rule Number Three. I'm still *avoiding* him physically if I don't *see* him, right? And Crookshanks acts much too intelligent to be a normal cat, alright? It was a compliment. A *compliment.*"

Ron and Hermione both sigh in unison.

"…Just do research and make notes on everything he does in class. Please."

"Only if you promise not to get too wrapped up in this, Harry," Hermione says seriously.

"Yeah, mate. The *Triwizard tournament* is happening this year. Let's just enjoy that, alright?"

Harry scowls, refusing to look up from his steak and potatoes. "I do *not* get too wrapped up in things."

::

Six weeks later, Harry finds himself in the library, going through stacks of observation notes he paid Colin and the Twins to help him get on Mad-Eye Moody. He's on notes for day nine, eyes bloodshot, when a hand touches his shoulders.

"Ron," Harry says without looking up, "Thank Merlin, you're back. Did you know that Mad-eye drinks from his flash *every single hour*, on the hour?! He drinks one swig and complains about the taste *every time*. Sound familiar? George got close and swore the flask smelled like __"

"Like what?"

Harry jumps back, chair nearly crashing in the shelves.

"Don't *do* that!" he hisses.

Cedric (because *of course* it's him, and not Ron) has his hands up. "What? Say hello?"

"Sneak up on me! I thought you were…" Harry quiets, glancing around quickly, "…Never mind."

"…Right… are you alright there? You look… tired."

"I'm fine," Harry jabs his quill into the desk, missing his ink pot by several inches. Rule Number Three must be religiously followed.

Cedric sets his bag down firmly. "Right," he says with a smile too bright, "I don't believe that for a second. Now, you're going to come with me to get some food, and then you can tell me why you suspect our DADA professor is taking periodic Polyjuice potions."

“I didn’t say—”

Cedric points down at the parchment Harry was about to fall asleep on, the giant scribbled words of *POLYJUICE POTION?* and *WHO ARE YOU REALLY?!*

Staring down at the traitorous paper, Harry mutters, “…Don’t you dare make a joke about this, I swear you must have a list of them stashed around somewhere.”

Cedric grins. “You wound me, Harry. If I wrote all my puns on paper, they’re be pretty *tear*able.”

“Don’t make me rip you in half.”

“Aha! A pun! I’m wearing off on you after all.”

“Argh! No, you’re not! That was an accident. I’ll never pun again.”

“We’ll see, Harry, we’ll see,” Cedric winks.

A warm silence settles between them.

“Well?” Harry says after a while, “Let’s hear it then. Tell me how crazy and paranoid I’m acting. It’s what Ron and Hermione keep saying.”

Cedric’s smile drops. “Look,” he puts his hand back on Harry’s shoulder, “Do you remember when the Chamber of Secrets opened two years ago? How everyone kept accusing you of being the Heir?”

“How could I forget?” Second year features many memories that Harry happily represses into a box of ‘do not open’ ever. He used to like snakes before that year. He still wonders where that Boa Constrictor from the zoo ended up.

“Well…” Cedric grimaces, “I was one of those people.”

A cold chill falls on Harry, the same as when he found out Tom Riddle’s real self.

“I know what you must be thinking. And I can’t apologize enough for it. But I bought into the hysteria. Then… I saw you the day you found out Granger had been attacked. You looked so devastated. Small. Just normal person, like anyone else. I’d never been so ashamed in my life. I thought… if I was wrong about you, what else have I been wrong about? How could I judge you so quickly?”

Harry’s mouth feels too dry. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because I promised myself that I would never judge you like that again without getting the facts first.”

Cedric looks at him so earnestly that Harry has no idea what to say.

“I’ve seen what kind of person you are, Harry. You’re funny. Loyal. Wicked on a broom. If you think something’s off with our DADA professor, then I believe you.”

Something hot wells up in Harry’s eyes. Besides Ron, Hermione (and now Sirius and Remus), no one’s ever tried to look at Harry and see *Harry* before. No one’s ever apologized for how they treated him and tried to be better.

Rule Number Three… suddenly doesn’t seem very important.

“…Every DADA professor I’ve had so far… has tried to kill me, more or less. I decided to watch out for what this year’s professor might do, so I got Colin and the Weasley Twins to do some snooping for me…” he explains, feeling lighter than ever.

By the time he’s finished giving Cedric a rough summary of his findings, he half expects Cedric to laugh and tell Harry that the twins are playing a joke on him. But Cedric doesn’t.

Cedric’s fists bunch up, he glares down at the parchment. “This is too much. Who the hell could be masquerading as an auror and *why*?”

Harry almost slumps over in his seat. “You… you believe me?”

“Weasleys don’t betray one of their own, not when it’s serious. I think after the attacks at the World Cup, you have all the reason to be suspicious,” Cedric assures him. “Besides, drinking something by the hour is *very* weird. It *could* be a strange tick of Mad-Eye’s, but we don’t have any evidence to back it up yet. I doubt anyone in the ministry has ever kept track of Mad-Eye’s drinking habits. Plus, Creevey and the Weasleys have only documented Mad-Eye’s drinking habits during class and mealtimes. We don’t have enough proof to go to Professor Dumbledore yet.”

Harry feels like he might be floating in another dimension. “…We?”

Cedric actually looks offended. And more imperfect. “Of course, *we!* I’m not going to let you sneak around and poking at a potential threat alone! I’m a prefect, you know. It’s my responsibility to look after you.”

Harry begins to smile. “Responsibility?”

“Oh yes, it’s written on paper, unlike my puns.”

This time, Harry lets himself laugh.

He’s a bit besotted with Cedric Diggory… and it might be okay.

In which Cedric has no chill

Chapter Notes

in which the author spews more nonsense. I swear the next chapter is the last one, I SWEAR

"So what's your plan for exposing fake-Moody?" Cedric asks, after making Harry eat. Hermione and Ron had been insufferable when Cedric dragged Harry over to Hufflepuff table for a bite. Ron even had the nerve to wink suggestively at Harry and gave a *if you hurt my friend* look to Cedric from across the room.

"Dunno. Usually we just stay on guard and watch for any suspicious movements," Harry admits, remembering how he and his friends suspected Snape in first year, and tried to unmask Malfoy in second year. Actually, Harry hasn't had the best track record with suspecting people. But when every DADA professor tries to kill you…

"Hmm..." Cedric frowns, putting more potatoes on Harry's plate. "I do night rounds on Mondays and Thursdays till midnight, the same times as Moody. If there was a way I could track him without his noticing…"

"Great! I'll just come with you then. I have an invisibility cloak." Harry watches as Cedric nearly chokes on a piece of steak. Oh no, he probably said something wrong. "Or I could just let you borrow it…? I mean, if I come with you, it probably counts as rule-breaking, which isn't good for the whole prefect thing…"

"No, no, you're coming with me. Just. *You have an invisibility cloak?*"

"…Surprise?"

Cedric's expression looks equivalent to one that is internally screaming.

::

Harry sneaks out around ten at night to meet Cedric at the trophy room. He spots Cedric pacing nervously and… sniffing himself?

Quietly, Harry tiptoes behind him and realizes that Cedric is wearing cologne. The kind of cologne that old men wear when they're about to go somewhere important. Harry would know because Uncle Vernon wears it a lot when he wants to impress his boss. Does Cedric want to distract fake-Moody with really smelly cologne…?

Shame, Harry rather likes Cedric's natural smell. It's soothing.

“Boo,” he says, hoping for some revenge for the puns.

Cedric jumps up a bit but doesn’t do anything embarrassing to make him look less handsome. Damn. Instead, he squints and whispers, “Harry? Is that you? Or Peeves? Because if it’s you, I want to say that you’re looking *boo*-tiful all invisible like that.”

Harry just groans, throwing off his cloak. “Urgh! I walked into that one!”

Cedric grins wider. “Literally. You could have just *ghosted* away.”

“That didn’t even make sense! That was awful! Boo! I demand a re-pun!”

“Really?” Cedric lights up.

“No,” Harry crosses his arms. “As if I’d give you the chance.”

“Oh, you don’t fool me, Potter. You *love* my puns. It’s as *clear* as day,” Cedric gestures to Harry’s missing lower half, still covered by part of the invisibility cloak.

Throwing the cloak back on to hide his hideous blush, Harry hisses, “I *will* cast a silencing spell if you keep this up all night.”

“Gasp, not the *silent* treatment!”

“*I’m muting you now*.”

“You know you love me,” Cedric sings slightly off-key. Finally, another imperfection. Shame that Harry wants to replay those notes over and over again until he feels sick of them.

“Urgh!” Harry storms off, letting Cedric chase after him with delight. Crushes are temporary. Surely, this crush on Cedric Diggory will wear off with time—like it did with Cho.

“Slow down, Harry!” Cedric follows the sound of his footsteps. “And don’t walk so fast. Don’t want Filch hearing you.”

“Could always pretend to be the Bloody Baron. I do a good impression of him,” Harry admits, remembering that incident in first year.

“Oooo, you do impressions? Now *this* I have to hear. Come on, do a Bloody Baron voice!” Cedric stares in the direction of Harry’s voice, somehow looking vacant and still ever-handsome.

“Well…” Harry glances around, checks the Marauder’s map to see if they’re alone. Yet another thing to explain to Cedric later. “Alright.” He clears his voice and bellows in a deep voice, “*Peeves, get your moronic hands out of my chains!”*

Cedric’s jaw drops.

“Um,” Harry pauses. “Was that not good?” Great. Now Cedric probably wants nothing to do with a bloke who just does impressions in his free time and Harry will have to go back to

burying himself in blankets and trying to reinforce Rule Number Three like a religion and—

"Wicked!" Cedric breathes, as if Harry performed the most stunning miracle. "You sounded just like him! I got actual *chills*. You literally *lifted my spirits*, I can't even…! Can you do others? What about Professor Snape? Or the headmaster? Give it a go!"

"Oh, well," Harry gapes, brain over frying from the impossibility that Cedric *likes* Harry's stupid brand of humour, "sure? Here's Snape then—*if I see you twitching for even a moment, Potter, it's detention for you! What is that? You breathed?! 25 points from Gryffindor!*"

The sounds of Cedric's delighted laughter fills a void Harry never knew he had.

They spend the rest of the patrol exchanging jokes—Cedric with his horrible puns and Harry with various other requested impressions. By the end, they don't run into Moody, but Harry finds himself not caring. This opportunity to just laugh with Cedric, unseen by judging eyes, just the two of them? It's worth everything.

::

"Have you considered voice acting?" Cedric asks him one late-night patrol, "Like on muggle television programs? If you don't go into professional Quidditch, I think you'd be great at it!"

Harry rolls his eyes, even if Cedric can't see the action when he's under the cloak. "No one wants to hear me make silly voices of different people. Who would want to listen to that?"

Cedric stops and looks very seriously at Harry. Somehow, his gaze seems to meet Harry's eyes, despite invisibility.

"I would," he says so solemnly that Harry has no idea what to do. "I'd listen to anything you say."

Mouth dry, robbed of all words, Harry splutters out, "Well, I'd only do it if you tried to be a comedian."

Cedric's eyes go wide. "What? Me, model straight-O student, become a comedian despite my parent's wishes of me gaining fame and fortune as the next Minister of Magic slash inventor of new spells?"

Whoa. Harry nearly trips on the cloak. That overload of information seems… heavy. Harry wonders if he should ask about it—

But then Cedric grins and there's something intense, unsaid, in that grin. Something too precious to name. "Then I'll do it. And you become a voice actor. And I'll torture you every day with new *pun*ishments."

"Oh my god," Harry breaks the staring contest first (not that Cedric can tell), and begins walking down the corridor again, "don't say things you don't mean, Diggory."

He doesn't notice Cedric's longing glance at his fading footsteps.

::

They continue like that, for two weeks, just teasing each other with more strange humour. Harry never asks Cedric about how he feels about his parents, Cedric never asks Harry about the Dursleys or the previous years. Those conversations feel like stains that would ruin the atmosphere between them.

During the day, Cedric and Harry's eyes meet often during mealtimes. They smile as if speaking another language, and Harry ignores Hermione's knowing looks and Ron's teasing. "See?" Hermione preens, "Rule Number Three didn't put you in any danger!"

"Still say we should watch Diggory. Don't want him hurting Harry in other ways," Ron points out.

"Oh, well, don't worry, I threatened him with many painful curses earlier last week," Hermione happily informs.

"What?!" Harry almost jumps towards the Hufflepuff table, to see if Cedric is unharmed.

"He's still in one piece," Hermione says unhelpfully.

"That's our girl," Ron nods approvingly.

Harry merely despairs that he has them as friends.

Harry shouldn't, but he starts to forget the reason he's sneaking out to walk with Cedric (invisibly) during his rounds. When he's with Cedric, he feels like he's flying. When he's with Cedric, he forgets that there's danger around.

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Students from Durmstrang and Beauxbatons arrive. The goblet of fire is announced and placed in the Great Hall. Harry hears Dumbledore speak about *glory* and *honor* awaiting the winner, but all he can focus on are the words of *danger* and *high death toll*. All he can remember is the way his scar hurt when he had that dream of Wormtail and the voice of you-know-who…

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"So…" Cedric says randomly during that night's patrol. "Those Durmstrang students, right? What do you think of them?"

"…Not much. Though Krum seems cool. Shame he sat with the Slytherins." Ron looked ready to froth at the mouth, or at least duel Malfoy for Krum's honour. Sometimes Harry wonders if Ron is into girls and blokes like Harry is. An awkward conversation for another awkward time probably.

"Oh. So… you… like Krum?"

“I guess?” Harry doesn’t know anything about other professional Quidditch players but if Ron says Krum is the best, then he must be the best right?

For some reason, Cedric looks like he just swallowed a lemon.

“Uh, don’t you like Krum? I thought he was one of your favourite players?”

“Not anymore,” Cedric muttered.

Harry frowns. “Why? Are you planning on the competing in the tournament too?” It’s the only reason Harry can think that Cedric might dislike Krum. “Please don’t tell me you’re competing.”

“What? Why?” Cedric snaps, stopping their walk abruptly. “You don’t think I can handle it?”

“I—*what?* That’s not what I said! Of course, you can handle it; you can do anything!”

For a moment, Cedric looks stunned. “Then, why don’t you want me competing?”

Harry scowls. “Didn’t you hear what Dumbledore said? It’s dangerous! People have *died* in this tournament! Just because I think you can do it doesn’t mean I want to see you put yourself in danger!”

Cedric starts to smile. “So… you were worried about me?”

The dreaded blush returns to Harry’s cheeks. “N-no!” Cedric’s face falls. “I mean, yes!” Cedric’s face brightens again. “Just, *stop making your face do that*, yes, I’m bloody worried about you!”

“Oh Harry, you don’t have to worry. The Ministry has been very diligent about making this tournament death free—”

But is anything really death-free? Did the people who built the Titantic think that?

“—My dad read over the rules and thinks it’s a good opportunity for me—”

Again, with Cedric’s dad… Harry remembers Wormtail slinking about, a flash of green light, and an old man’s empty-dead eyes…

“—He wants me to do well, so I should—”

“You don’t have to do everything your dad tells you to do,” Harry blurts out before he knows it. “You should be thinking about your safety!”

Cedric goes pale. Then he glowers, looking colder than Snape on a warpath. “Dad’s just looking out for me, Harry. He wants me to be successful—”

“At the cost of your life?”

“*Why* do you keep insisting the tournament is dangerous?”

“I just do! I have a bad feeling!”

“That’s not good enough!” Cedric shouts, his perfect face *finally* cracking because of their stupid words.

Harry just breathes, stares at this boy who has become something irreplaceable in his life. This boy who looks terribly human.

“…What happened to believing me?” Harry’s voice cracks, despite how much he internally tells it not to. Don’t let Cedric see how much his words affect him. Don’t.

Cedric’s shoulders slump down. His lips tremble. “I do… I do believe you. I just… I want to hear *why* you think this. What aren’t you telling me? Don’t you trust me, Harry?”

Oh, Harry thinks, *I’m an idiot.*

Just how much as Harry told Cedric about Voldemort, about his dreams? Just how long has Harry just hidden the truth because he couldn’t trust the adults around him? Cedric heard Harry’s accusations against Moody and *listened*, even if Harry’s reasonings were circumstantial. Cedric is here, still, despite all these fruitless patrols.

Slowly, Harry takes off his invisibility cloak, ignoring the way Cedric gasps in worry.

“…Sometimes,” he says quietly, “I have dreams about Voldemort, like they’re really happening. And my scar really hurts. I got it from his killing curse. It… forms a connection between us. This summer, I had a dream. I saw him… some grotesque and monstrous form of him, being taken in by an old servant, and killing a muggle. I could *feel* him, planning something. I think… I think he wants to hurt me. I think… this tournament would be the best way for him to do that. I think that anyone caught up in the tournament could get hurt because of him too. And I… I don’t want that for you, Cedric. Ever. You’re too good for this. You don’t deserve to get caught up in whatever sick plans Voldemort comes up with. I want you to live.”

Softly, Cedric whispers, “Oh,” his gaze scalding against Harry’s eyes.

Harry looks away, feeling burned. “…Sorry. I know it’s stupid. I’m just paranoid and…” *Scared.*

“No, *I’m* sorry. I should have… I should have *known.* You’d never… Merlin, you must think I’m stupid, getting stressed out over my dad’s wants of all things.”

“No!” Harry grabs his hand. “Of course not! Family is important!” If James and Lily Potter were alive, Harry can’t imagine what he would do for them. He hopes he wouldn’t be spoiled and treasure them the way they deserve…

“*You’re* important,” Cedric blurts, “or at least, you’re important to *me*. Dad just… expects too much sometimes, and I get caught up in it, I have to be the best in everything. I have to smile and be perfect. I forget to look at the big picture… but you… you amaze me all the time, you know that?”

Cedric should probably get his eyes checked. Harry isn't amazing in any way. Just stupidly lucky, as Professor McGonagall put it once. *Cedric's* the amazing one, dealing with all that pressure and still remaining so kind…

"Don't worry," Cedric steps closer, tightening his grip on Harry's hand. "I won't die."

Harry stares up at Cedric's determined gaze and thinks, *if this boy said he was going to rule the world one day, I'd believe him.* Still, he can't help but ask, "How do you know?"

"Well, someone has to be there to protect you from Voldemort and Moody after all," Cedric winks, watching Harry splutter with a smile, before looking grim again. "Besides, it's the least I can do after you told me something so private. So… *thank you*."

"…You…!" Damn Cedric Diggory and his stupid-killer smile, "That's not something to *thank* me for…!"

"Plus I'll be a better champion than Krum."

Harry feels so startled, he laughs. "Alright, just what is your problem with Krum?"

Cedric spends the rest of the patrol avoiding the answer with a smile.

::

"So are we cheering for Cedric as Hogwarts champion or Angelina? Because I have to pick a side early on, just so the twins don't accuse me of switching sides," Ron says.

"Cedric, of course! Why were you going to cheer for Angelina? We're teammates but Cedric hangs out with us more…" Harry scowls, upset at this friend betrayal.

Ron shakes his head. "More like hangs out with *you*…"

Harry ignores that.

"Right… I'll just buy a *Support Diggory* button for you too then…"

Harry wears it above his Gryffindor insignia, pleased to see Cedric stuttering and red at the sight of it.

::

They don't find any proof that Moody is up to something, though they see him loitering around the Great Hall a lot. Cedric starts requesting more patrols that week, baggy eyes growing during the day. He waves off Harry's concern, a determined glint in his eyes.

"Hufflepuffs keep their promises, Harry," he tells him in the days leading up to Halloween. Though, by the thirtieth of October, Harry makes Cedric's housemates keep him in bed. The increasing glares at Krum and Cedric's tendency to start snoring during mealtimes were getting too much.

“We’ll both survive if we miss one night of patrol,” Harry jokes, suddenly feeling that Rule Number One should never take priority over Cedric’s health.

“…Could kiss you, ‘arry…” Cedric murmurs sleepily, slumped against one of his housemates.

Harry goes scarlet, rushing away to avoid Hufflepuff teasing.

Stupid Cedric and his stupid flirty personality is probably only into girls anyways…

::

The Goblet of Fire makes its selections. Fleur Delacour for Beauxbatons. Viktor Krum for Durmstrang (Harry cheers loudly for him, despite Cedric’s sullen pout). Cedric Diggory for Hogwarts (of course, *of course*, Harry shouts the loudest then.)

…And Harry Potter for an unnamed school.

::

Everyone in the Great Hall goes silent. Harry feels the pressure, the paranoia, the fear from the past few months clawing up inside him. Beside him, Ron starts to mutter, “Oh god, Rule Number One was real,” while Hermione tries to gently push Harry out of his seat.

Is this what a dead man walking feels like?

Every step Harry takes makes him feel like he’s adding another heavy chain to his chest. Another burden. He’s only fourteen. He barely passes his classes. Hell, he only survived his first few years at Hogwarts because of Hermione and Ron. How will he survive this alone?

Finally, when Harry reaches the private room where the Champions are gathered, he looks up at Cedric’s shocked face and he feels the urge to cry.

I was supposed to prevent this from happening, he thinks, *so much for my rules…*

“Is it time for us to go back out there, little boy?” Delacour asks him with her heavy French accent.

Harry can’t speak, can’t feel anything…

Cedric steps closer. “Harry? Is something wrong?” He stares at Harry’s sweaty forehead, the dread on his face. Realization comes quickly. “Oh Merlin… did the Goblet…?”

Harry only stiffly nods.

Anger starts to bloom on Cedric’s face, and Harry wants to plead it isn’t his fault… He wants to be there for Cedric, truly, but—

Before Harry can say anything, the Heads of all the Schools begin arguing about Harry’s placement in the tournament. Harry hears something about magical contracts being binding,

about a threat to his life, but he finds that he can't bring himself to care. People try to kill him every year. No, he's too busy staring at Cedric's fists, clenching tighter the longer the professors argue…

::

"Cedric!" Harry tries to catch him in the corridor, oddly remembering the pun Cedric made about catching him so long ago…

With a dark face, Cedric rushes past Harry, grunting, "Sorry, talk later," as if disgusted.

Harry can't bring himself to enjoy the party in Gryffindor tower later that night. He buries himself in blankets and lets Ron rant to him about ways to find whoever put his name in the goblet.

::

"Mister Potter? Wake up! You're needed in the headmaster's office!"

"Urgh… huh?" Harry says unintelligibly, still stuck in a dream of Cedric shunning him to run away with a walking skeleton.

Professor McGonagall's stern face looks down at him.

"Um… what's happening?" Is he in trouble? Did Dumbledore find a way for Harry to bypass the magical contract?

"I believe that's something your friend Mister Diggory can answer."

"Cedric?!" Harry immediately jumps out of bed, uncaring of his overgrown pyjamas. "Where is he? What happened? Is he hurt?"

Professor McGonagall's eyebrow rises. "Oh no, Mister Potter, I don't think you need to worry about him. In fact, Mister Diggory was the one who did the harming."

"Wait, what?!"

::

Indeed, when Harry arrives in Dumbledore's office, a sheepish Cedric Diggory stands next to a strange man tied to a chair. A strange man wearing Moody's robes. A strange man who looks somewhat similar to Barty Crouch, if he were several years younger.

"Oh! Harry! Hi!" Cedric waves awkwardly. "Surprise!"

"…What is going on?" Harry gapes.

Dumbledore, twinkling at his desk, only shrugs. "Mister Diggory was just about to explain how he found a convicted death eater—who should be in Azkaban by the way—disguised as our DADA professor."

Harry feels the room begin to spin. Is it spinning? Was Harry actually *right* about his Polyjuice theory?!

Cedric grins, and the for first time, Harry can see the sharp edge to it. “Well, Harry told me about not-Moody’s strange drinking habits a few weeks earlier. Very odd, drinking something every hour, on the hour. We suspected Polyjuice potion.”

“But you had no real proof,” Dumbledore says.

“No,” Cedric agrees, “not really. But then Harry’s name came out of the Goblet… and I just *knew* that it had to be him. I couldn’t risk Harry, so I confronted not-Moody on my own, stunned him, and waited for the transformation to drop. Then I brought him to you.”

Yup. Harry needs to sit down. He plops down to the floor, next to an already flabbergasted McGonagall.

Cedric looks down at Harry in concern, looking eager to go to him.

“You could have come to me with your suspicions,” Dumbledore presses, still looking calm.

“Um, no offense sir, but DADA professors hired under you have tried to kill Harry *every year*. Your judgement isn’t always the best. I wanted to be sure not-Moody couldn’t hurt Harry anymore.”

At those words, even Dumbledore looks speechless. Even contrite.

Slowly, Dumbledore says, “I… am ashamed to say that you are right. If I was more attentive, I would have recognized that not-Moody wasn’t acting like my friend… only a mere imitation… but I let myself get distracted by other thoughts. I must say, I’m grateful that Harry has a dedicated protector in yourself, Mister Diggory.”

Cedric only smiles fiercely.

::

The rest of the night is spent being interviewed by aurors and lawyers. Apparently, not-Moody’s name is Barty Crouch Jr, scandalous, and the *real* Moody was locked up in a trunk. As the aurors make their arrests and continue questioning more professors, Madame Bones is called in to put Barty Crouch Jr in a protective facility for further questions, just in time to stop Fudge from sentencing him to a dementor’s kiss…

“*Why* did you do it?” Harry finally asks, after what feels like hours of huddling in a shock blanket, sitting next to Cedric.

“….Uh, because I’m awesome? You’ll have to be more specific.”

Harry has the urge to push Cedric off the comfy sofa that McGonagall conjured up. “I mean, why did you confront Crouch alone?! You could have talked to me, could have asked me to come with you!”

Cedric actually has the decency to look ashamed. “I know. And I don’t blame you if you don’t trust me after this… but I couldn’t let you be in danger again… You didn’t see what you looked like after your name came out of the cup! You looked… *devastated*. It was unforgiveable.”

Harry refuses to melt from that line. Refuses! “So you put *yourself* in danger?! You were lucky you got the drop on him! He’s a trained death eater! He could have killed you!”

“…Would have been worth it.”

“And what if I was wrong? What if that was the *actual* Moody?! You would have been expelled! Your perfect record would be ruined! Your dad would shun you, and shut up, I know how you’re always worrying about what your dad thinks! Why did you risk all of that for some crazy theory I thought of a few months ago?! Why would you be so stupid?”

Cedric leans in, his mouth only a few breaths away from Harry’s.

“Because he hurt you. I couldn’t forgive that.”

Harry thinks of a saying he heard once about never harming those under a Hufflepuff’s protection. The steady but angry light in Cedric’s eyes is the most intense emotions Harry has ever seen. Suddenly, Harry wonders if he should have asked the hat to put him in Hufflepuff instead…

“I care about you,” Cedric ducks his head away. “Perfect grades, a great reputation… what’s that worth if I stand there and let you get hurt? I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself.”

“But…” Harry says, as he thinks *oh no, oh no, oh no,* “I haven’t done anything to deserve this.”

Cedric chuckles. “Do you know why I say those silly puns all the time?”

“What does that have to do with—”

“Humour me.”

Harry fights the urge to roll his eyes. “Because you think they’re cool?”

“No, because I get to see you smile.”

The room suddenly feels too hot, too small.

“Sorry what?” *Why do you care if I’m smiling?*

Cedric’s grin grows too soft, too wide.

“You know, when you smile, it’s like… the whole room lights up. It was the first time I thought I was really seeing the real Harry, and I thought I wanted that for myself.”

Shit, Harry's mind goes into overload. *Is this is real? Mayday, mayday, is this bigger than a crush?!*

"Thought I'd make it clear but… did it hurt when you fell from heaven?" Cedric has the audacity to say with a straight face.

The excitement from the unexplored territory of *feelings* dies in a fire.

Harry just groans and puts his face in his hands. "Just. Shut up for a bit, Cedric."

Cedric's laugh at that is not addicting, damn it. Especially when he has the nerve to try other pick-up lines.

In Which Cedric Learns to Flirt

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the long wait! Every time I try to write this fic, I blush over the overload of fluff and have to take a break. I've also been having depression ups and downs as I try to finish my degree, and it's hard to write this fic when I'm not feeling the joy. Thank you for being patient with me! There were more scenes I wanted to include but I think this is a good place to end. For now :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Are you a wizard, Harry?"

"Cedric, what are you, no, stop—"

"Because when I look at you, everyone else disappears."

"*URGH!*" Harry buries his head in his hands, mostly to hide his blush, but also to discourage Cedric's stupid idea that pick-up lines should be part of normal conversation. Why must Cedric toy with Harry's heart like this? Why are Harry's lips twitching? Stop. *Twitching.* "I'm leaving. I'm going back to bed. Professor McGonagall, I'm allowed to go to bed now, right? Please?"

He does his best to look adorable and puppy-like. For some reason, Cedric's cheeks go red.

With an amused grin, McGonagall nods, "Of course, Potter. You deserve a break from this atrocious wordplay."

"Finally, someone gets it! Professor McGonagall, I promise I'll study transfiguration religiously from now on. Point 1 Potter, Point 0 Diggory."

"Actually it's *2* points for me," Cedric mumbles.

"And you weren't taking Transfiguration seriously before…?" McGonagall raises her brow.

"I mean. Yes. Of course. Always. Oh wow," Harry fakes a yawn, "I'm *so* tired. I should go…"

"I'll see you in my dreams!" Cedric calls after him.

"Maybe in my nightmares!" Harry calls back.

"Just go to sleep, both of you. Back to *your own* dormitories, Merlin," McGonagall shakes her head. "Adolescents, honestly…"

Face burning red, Harry rushes back to Gryffindor tower.

::

By morning, Harry has no idea what to tell Ron. He can't sleep a wink, thoughts focused on what the hell a death eater like Barty Crouch Jr would want with him… and on Cedric's stupid face, stupid puns, and stupid brave self. Why can't Cedric go and use his terrible flirting skills on people he's actually interested in? Why must he play around with Harry's stupid heart?

Stupid straight perfect boy.

When Ron shouts that it's time to get up, Harry groans and wishes his bedsheets could eat him.

"Whoa there, mate. No offense, but you look terrible. Maybe you should stay in bed. I can make up an excuse for Professor McGonagall, say you've got a cold or something," Ron pokes him warily.

For a moment, Harry considers taking Ron's suggestion. But he thinks of Cedric's disappointed (or worse, *worried*) expression and decides against it. Besides, he needs to see if the *Daily Prophet* reports on anything that happened last night…

"*Harry!*" Hermione bursts into the boy's dorm, waving the paper in the air. "*What's this about a death eater trying to kill you?!*"

Never mind. Apparently Harry doesn't need to get out of bed after all. The universe has answered his question about the *Daily Prophet* for him.

Ron drops his tie. "A what?!"

Harry shrugs. "It's fine now."

"How is *any of this* fine?!"

Hermione looks near tears while Ron seems ready to blow something up.

"Really, it is! Cedric caught him for me."

Immediately Hermione and Ron exchange bewildered glances. Harry feels his face burn after realizing what he said.

"Not that I *asked* him to, he just, felt…"

(*I care about you*.)

"ThatNotMoodyWasReallySuspicious. Yup. Can we go to breakfast now?"

"Wait, Harry, where are you going?! Put on your socks and *explain this right now!*"

::

Breakfast is chaotic. Harry should have stayed in bed. Every table teems with gossip over the latest Rita Skeeter article (whoever she is, she gets word out quick). He hears Malfoy cry out in outrage that they were taught by a formerly-convicted imposter (*father will hear about this!*) and Ravenclaws panic over who will take over the DADA position (*please not Snape!*) and sees sympathetic glances in his direction (*poor brave Harry, he didn't want this!*) and hears sneers that this is all just publicity. Lies.

Those sneers are like his second year all over again, the whispers of *Slytherin's Heir* clinging to his ears. Suddenly, Harry feels painfully aware that he's dressed in his night clothes, with the uniform robe thrown hastily on. Hermione and Ron are still chasing him, he can't go out into the hall like this, what is he thinking—

A warm presence settles along his back. "Harry," Cedric's voice says by his ear, "Fancy seeing you around here. I *must* be dreaming…"

Oh no. Nope. Not today, Diggory!

Whirling around, Harry splutters. "Don't you dare say it—"

Grinning that insufferable, handsome smile, Cedric winks. "…Because you're a dream come true!"

"*No…!*"

He throws his head down against Cedric's shoulder, hoping to beat himself to death or headbutt Cedric's puns away. Maybe even melt into Cedric's robes. He's not hiding a blush. Honest.

"That is the most rubbish line I've ever heard in my life."

"I don't know… I thought I was *smooth*ing my way into your heart quite nicely."

"Absolutely not, if you keep this up!"

"But if I don't keep up, how will I reach the heaven where you are?" Cedric has the audacity to wink again.

Yup. His face is definitely red now. From anger of course. Not flattery.

This isn't fair, Harry thinks. *I'm going to die.*

By now students around them start whispering about Cedric and Harry's weirdly 'cozy' atmosphere.

"Shouldn't Diggory be snubbing him by now?" some whisper.

"Are you kidding? Have you seen how attached they've been these past few months?"

“But Potter stole Diggory’s spot!”

“More like my heart,” Cedric whispers for only Harry to hear.

“Don’t say that out loud!” Harry hisses, wishing he could be one with the floor, “They’ll think you actually *mean* it!”

Cedric actually look insulted, as if Harry called him a traitor. “Why wouldn’t I mean it?” He stands too close, too warm.

“…I…” Harry can’t think. Words make no sense. This is why he needs lists. Lists make sense. The student body’s whispers rise up again. They whisper that Harry isn’t worthy, isn’t as smart or handsome as Cedric, will barely be any competition…

“…Diggory’s the *true* champion. Potter’s a rotter…” someone hisses.

That’s when Harry hears an ominous crack. Startled, he blinks up to see Cedric smiling as aggressively as hyenas about to pounce on prey.

“I’m sorry,” Cedric steps towards Harry until they are shoulder to shoulder, “but I doubt I can be the ‘true’ Hogwarts champion when Harry’s name was *forced* into the goblet as a plot on his life. You can check the Daily Prophet. I’m told it was published today.”

Warily, the students twitter back and forth, unnerved by Cedric’s strange smile.

“…W-well,” one Hufflepuff stutters, “we *did* read it. B-but what if Potter was in on it with Crouch and—”

“*Excuse me?*”

The hall goes quiet.

“Did you just imply that Harry would willingly work with one of the people who worshipped his family’s murderer? And for what? Something like… *attention*?”

The automatic shame sinking into every face is a magic that Harry would *love* to see again.

“I thought so,” Cedric huffs. “Come on, Harry. This morning seems nice enough for a picnic.”

Harry can only nod helplessly as Cedric leads him to the nearest table, levitates a basket full of food up, and then marches outside. To his horror, Hermione and Ron wink as they leave. (Well, Ron looks like he’s trying to strangle a chicken, but that counts as a wink right?)

When they make it outside, Cedric coughs. “Sorry.”

Harry, still trying to compute the last twenty-four hours of his life, says, “Huh?”

“I shouldn’t have done that. I know you can handle things yourself, but I just got so *angry* they were insulting you and—”

"…I don't get it."

Cedric stops in mid-gesture.

"I said, I don't *get* it. You saw what happened last night. Barty Crouch Jr put my name in. I'm really a fraud. I'm nothing special. I'm just Harry. I'm not the true Hogwarts champion, *you* are. Why aren't you more upset about this? I shouldn't be up there anymore, I should be watching you *win*, and I'm *still* in this bloody tournament—"

"Well, I'm *glad*," Cedric blurts out. "I'm glad you're in this tournament with me. I mean, I'm not glad you were put in danger, but *I stopped that*. And I'll stop anything else that tries to hurt you. Don't listen to them. You might think you're not a true champion, but you're the champion of my heart and that's what matters."

Harry feels like his lungs might collapse.

"…I'm the champion of *what?!*"

Cedric turns away, ears pink. "…You heard me."

Slowly, Harry's shoulders begin to shake.

I give up, he thinks as he bursts into laughter, *I love him and he's a terrible flirt who will never love me back and I hate it.*

::

With his acceptance of his cursed feelings for Cedric Perfect Diggory and knowing that they will remain unrequited, Rita Skeeter's dramatic article about Barty Crouch Junior feels like a strange joke from another dimension. Trivial and boring.

Naturally, Cedric takes the article's words very personally. Yet another reason Harry love-hates him.

"Did you see what she wrote about you?! *Fragile?* You? You're not fragile! Yes, the Ministry and Professor Dumbledore should have been more careful to protect you but you're hardly *fragile.* And then she has the audacity to hint that this might be some made-up excuse to make people feel sorry for you?! That you might still be cheating?! There hasn't even been a trial yet! She doesn't know all the facts! And Azkaban isn't very impenetrable if Sirius Black, and now Barty Crouch Jr., have escaped from there now is it?!"

Ron, alarmed, whispers to Harry. "Uh, should we stop him mate?"

Harry glances at the students giving them a wide berth in the corridors as they head to lunch. Hermione, in particular, seems pleased as she smiles deviously at anyone who dares to glance at Cedric's implosion.

"No, I think we can keep him ranting for a little while longer…"

"Oh! Sirius!" Harry brightens up. "Do you think this will be enough to prove he's innocent?"

“Depends on what Crouch Jr. confesses. Could send Amelia Bones an owl to question him about Sirius’s loyalties. If he knows about the Pettigrew thing that would be great!” Hermione agrees, pulling out a quill and parchment immediately.

Cedric drops his fork. “Um. Did you say Sirius Black is innocent? The murderer Sirius Black? Really?”

“Ah, sorry, I’ll tell you about it later tonight if you still want to patrol with me,” Harry says.

Cedric beams, “Of course I want to patrol with you still. Are we still studying together today?”

“Remember,” Ron cuts in before Harry can answer, “just because Sirius Black is innocent doesn’t mean that he doesn’t know thirteen different ways to kill a man. Also he’s Harry’s godfather. Just so you know.”

When Cedric nearly chokes on his next bite, Harry decides to throttle Ron.

::

The next month goes by much faster, much lighter, now that Harry doesn’t have to worry about his professor killing him. Lupin returns (“only temporarily,” he insists) to teach them and Harry eagerly introduces him to Cedric when he’s invited for tea.

They seem to get along, smiling too brightly at each other, even if they speak a bit too politely with each other and Lupin jokes that wolves are protective of their kin. It doesn’t mean anything. Cedric is straight. Harry’s seen him hanging out with Cho. They’re probably together. Yup.

Harry and Cedric spend their free hours together, trying to research spells for the first task, and playing quidditch. Sometimes Harry shows Cedric different muggle word games like riddles and word searches and Cedric treats them like amazing treasures. Sometimes Cedric teaches Harry some Ancient Runes because he claims it’s a “damn shame” that Harry didn’t pick it as an elective.

The Daily Prophet keeps reporting on the Barty Crouch Jr. trial. Some of Crouch Jr.’s testimonies, under veritaserum are released to the public by Skeeter—rantings of bringing the Dark Lord back to life (dismissed as crazy talk), rantings of planned murder of Harry, rantings of Pettigrew’s incompetence as a death eater (hence reopening the Sirius Black case) —and Harry doesn’t tell anyone about his nightmares… of someone angry, cursing Pettigrew in the dark…

He’s fine. He’s Cedric’s friend and he can control his feelings and someday he won’t have to worry about Voldemort anymore. He’s perfectly fine.

::

Several reporters try to shove their way in Harry’s face to ask him about the Barty Crouch Jr. trials and the Sirius Black case. Immediately, Harry hides behind Krum and hopes that

Krum's celebrity status will be enough to distract them.

It is. Harry mentally decides to send Krum a thank you package of chocolate when he can.

"Harry!" Cedric happily walks to his side. The other champions, Krum and Fleur, seem content to talk to the other reporters. "How have you been?"

"Cedric, we talked two hours ago at breakfast. You know how I am."

"Alas, when I'm with you, time disappears."

Harry tries to hide his blush with a laugh. "That wasn't very good. You're off your pun game."

"Just saving the best for last. I *was* going to look for the clock, but I can never find the *time*."

Burying his face in his hands, Harry groans, "Please stop and explain to me what wand weighing is. Are we… actually weighing wands?"

"Oh, no. It's more of a formality, a way to see if your wand is in good condition. It would be terrible if a champion had an accident because of a broken wand."

Remembering Ron's broken wand causing Lockhart to lose his memory, Harry shivers. "Got it."

The ceremony doesn't take too long. Harry doesn't really pay attention to much besides how close Cedric stands to him. When it ends, Harry nearly asks Cedric if he wants to get some hot cocoa from the kitchens when he's shoved into a broom closest with an intimidating older lady.

"Um…??" Harry blinks up at her.

"Rita Skeeter, darling. Correspondent for the Daily Prophet. Just wanted to ask a few questions. Our readers are so very curious about how you're handling things. You don't mind, do you? I have a quill here to note down everything you're saying. How *do* you feel about being forced into this tournament?"

"Uh…??" Harry barely sees what the quill writes, something about *Harry Potter, with dashing emerald eyes, begins to tear up at the fear of Barty Crouch Jr.'s sinister plot…* "I'm not crying! What is that thing writing?"

Before Skeeter can answer, the cupboard doors blast open. Cedric stands there, the dangerous stance from the night he captured Barty Crouch Jr. back.

"I'm sorry, Miss, but isn't it illegal to question minors on school property without the presence of their parent or guardian?" Cedric smiles.

Skeeter splutters. "Well, dear Harry's an orphan and I doubt his muggle relatives—"

“Right, I’ll just take Harry then. Goodbye,” Cedric pulls Harry out of the closest and shuts the door thoroughly.

Several bangs and shouts of frustration shake the doors.

Harry gapes. “Are we just going to leave her there?”

“Trust me,” Cedric glowers, “she deserves it. Think of how ready she was to get you alone. That’s not a good sign at all.”

The paranoia junkie inside Harry agrees.

“Well, alright. But we should tell a professor she’s locked in there.”

“Fine by me.” Cedric brushes a curl of hair behind Harry’s ear.

“Oh, wait, there’s a bug on your shoulder,” Harry grabs the little beetle before it can fly away. “Hmmm…” He glares down at it, suddenly very aware of Rule Number 2, of how the markings around the beetle’s eyes look like a reporter’s glasses…

He puts it in an anti-Animagus jar immediately and decides to let Hermione handle it.

::

Hermione handles the beetle-in-the-jar by getting Rita Skeeter thrown in Azkaban for being an illegal animagus *and* for spying on minors. Thank Merlin for Hermione.

Ron starts muttering the Rules in his sleep religiously.

::

“Cedric, the first task is dragons and I’ve bought you all the anti-fire robes I could find on such a short notice. Also, I found some books on how to deal with dragons, do you know any of the spells in them? They won’t be too difficult for you, right? You’re a Sixth-year student, you’ll be fine—” Harry hyperventilates, thinking of all the terrible dragon-related injuries Cedric could get.

“Harry,” Cedric pulls him close, and smiles against his ear. “I’ll be fine. *We’ll* be fine, as long as we don’t *dragon* our feet. Hey, wait, Harry come back! I was joking! Don’t make me *dragon* after you!”

Maybe Harry can fall out of love with Cedric if he listens to enough puns.

::

Harry doesn’t hold his breath as he watches Cedric’s match against the dragon. He doesn’t rush immediately to Cedric’s side and collapse against Cedric’s shoulder when he sees the anti-fire robes did the trick. He doesn’t feel warm as Cedric fusses about Harry’s broken arm.

He’s just *fine*.

::

“I have to ask a girl out to the ball?!” Harry yelps.

McGonagall nods. “It’s tradition.”

“But… but… I can’t dance!”

“You’ll learn.”

“I… I’ve never… I mean… WhatifIdon’twanttoaskagirl?!” Harry blurts out. Then immediately regrets everything in his life. It’s over. They’ll kick him out for consorting with boys. No one will ever talk to him again—

“Then ask a male then.”

Harry almost falls over. “I’m sorry, what?”

McGonagall looks ready to snap, but seeing Harry’s distress, softens. “Mr. Potter, in the Wizarding World, it is perfectly acceptable to choose a partner of any gender. We don’t discriminate over same-sex couples. We merely don’t openly advertise such things. But if you were to escort a male student, I would make sure anyone who spoke against you would be *severely* punished.”

“I… oh.”

With a pause, McGonagall whispers, “Is that satisfactory, Mr. Potter?”

He has no idea. He cannot compute.

“Well… I dunno, professor… I’m not completely gay. I like girls too so I might ask a girl…” If he can think of any he can tolerate romantically without picturing Cedric’s smile.

“And that’s also acceptable too, Mr. Potter. There are plenty of wizards and witches who prefer all genders as well. I believe it’s called being bisexual. Or pansexual, if the lingo has changed. I’m not completely to date on the terms.”

“So… so it’s really okay?”

McGonagall smiles patiently. “It’s completely fine.”

Harry’s shoulders relax.

“Perhaps you can ask Diggory to the ball. I’m sure he would accept.”

“OkayProfessorGoodTalkBye.”

::

Now that Harry can ask, well, *anyone*, to the ball, he has… no idea what to do. Besides Cho and Cedric, he hasn’t really noticed anyone else before. He doubts Cedric will ask him,

seeing as Cedric has been spending more time with Cho recently… He tries not to feel too hurt by this (Cedric is straight, Cedric is straight!) and brainstorms possible date-mates.

Ron. They could go as friends. Hermione. Wait, doesn't Hermione already have a date? Never mind. Ginny? That would feel strange. He sees her as a sister and doesn't want to lead her on… Maybe Neville! Ah, but would Neville want to go with a boy? How do you know if a boy is interested in boys?!

"Harry, watch out—"

He ends up walking into a book shelf, toppling books all around him. Urgh.

"Harry!" Oh no, Cedric has seen his shame. "Are you alright? What were you thinking?!"

"I was… distracted."

"Uh-huh," Cedric fights back a grin. "Well, I guess you only have your *shelf* to blame if you don't pay attention to where you're going."

"I have a wand and I'm not afraid to use it."

"But you've already used it!"

Oh no—

"You've enchanted me with your looks," Cedric beams proudly.

Harry might start crying from one-sided feelings.

"But seriously, what's wrong? You look like someone died."

"I…" Should he ask Cedric? "Well… I guess, I was just trying to figure out how…"

Cedric stands closer. His breath ghosts Harry's cheeks. "How what?"

"Well, how to know if a…" McGonagall said it's normal in the Wizarding World, and Cedric wouldn't betray him. Even if he is straight. And unavailable. "Ifaboyisinterestedinboystoo."

Cedric's eyes widen. "You're interested in another boy?"

Immediately, Harry's mind goes into hyperdrive. Abort, abort, abort, he hates you, abort—

"What's great!" Cedric beams. "You can just ask him."

"R-really? J-just ask? It won't be weird or anything?"

"Of course not! If he cares about you, he won't make it weird."

"Oh! Then—"

Cedric leans in eagerly.

“—I’ll go ask Neville then! We can just go as friends if he’s—”

“What?! Longbottom?!” Cedric blanches. “But—I thought…? Do you actually like him romantically?”

“Oh, no. The guy I like is… well… probably straight. He flirts a lot with me, but it’s just teasing, I’m sure… he wouldn’t like someone like me… I’m just Harry…” he mumbles, trying to comfort himself.

Cedric looks ready to spontaneously combust.

“You…!” he breathes. Then takes another breathe. And nods to himself. “Right. Someday, I’m going to learn who made your self-esteem so low and then I’m going to have to do terrible things to them. But today is not that day.”

Wait what?

“Don’t ask Longbottom out yet. Just, uh, wait till tomorrow evening. I just need to get some things ready and then—oh, wait, that’s brilliant. I’m a genius.” Cedric leans forward and kisses Harry on the cheek. “I’ll see you at breakfast, Harry! Don’t ask Longbottom just yet!”

Harry spends the rest of the evening wondering if he hallucinated the cheek kiss.

::

“Hermione?”

“Yes, Ron?”

“I think Diggory broke Harry.”

“Why do you think that, Ron?”

“Because he keeps muttering that bastard’s name in his sleep and it’s driving me mad. Seamus and Dean have already got a betting pool on when they’ll get together.”

“…Did you at least enter us in?”

“Hermione!?” Ron gasps, scandalized.

“What? It’s easy money. And you need new dress robes.”

“Put me down for 5 Galleons for tomorrow morning. Also remind me to give Diggory the shovel talk again when they starting dating.”

A long suffering sigh. “Yes, yes…”

::

Harry considers drowning himself in his cereal when he can’t think of how to ask Neville to the ball when the grand hall suddenly goes quiet.

Anxiously, Harry looks up and sees a golden snitch fly up to him with crystalline wings. It flutters by his nose and seems to nuzzle at his cheek until Harry tentatively catches it and it falls open like a golden flower.

Inside the snitch, a small golden rose rises up to touch his face. The rose has a little piece of parchment wrapped around it that Harry slowly unravels.

You've always caught me. I've always been sincere. I truly like you, "just" Harry, and I will treasure you forever, if you would do me the honour of escorting you to the ball. Not as friends. But romantically.

Yours, Cedric Diggory.

Harry's hand starts to tremble.

"Well?" a voice says from behind. "Will you say yes?"

Harry doesn't dare turn around. "You… you actually mean it? Every single pick-up line you've ever said… they were… they were *serious?*"

"Good as gold," Cedric whispers and Harry chokes out a half-laugh, half-sob.

"You are a *terrible* flirt. Absolutely awful."

"But I'm *your* flirt."

"Oh my stars," a Gryffindor girl utters breathlessly. "It's *actually happening*."

Harry almost says 'no' because who could love him? He doesn't know how to love anyone. He's never had parents to show him how a couple should act, he's never kissed anyone, never confessed, or dated, or held hands but—

Being with Cedric, just being beside him, feels so warm and true. Being with Cedric is the hardest and easiest thing in the world. Harry feels like himself around him. He feels like he's staring into an abyss of stars that he could get lost in if he jumps and…

"Mate," Ron whispers with an encouraging smile. "It's real. Go for it. You deserve happiness."

Hermione nods and squeezes his hand.

Harry takes a deep breath and turns around. He almost turns back again when he sees the bouquet of golden roses in Cedric's hands and Cedric's sheepish, ever nervous, grin.

"I love you," Harry blurts out. Then internally screams at himself when Cedric's face goes blank. "Oh shit. Sorry. That was too much, I—"

"…Is that a 'yes'?"

How the hell is Harry in love with him again?

Harry shoves the roses away and pulls Cedric into a kiss. “Yes, it’s a bloody yes, damn it,” Harry breathes, then kisses him again.

The entire Hall breaks into applause as Cedric pulls Harry for a deeper kiss.

Fleur blows her nose and mutters, “It’s so beautiful!!”

Snape tries to take off points for public indecency. Dumbledore gives them points for acts of true love. Then decides to give every couple in Hogwarts extra points because he does what he wants. For once, Snape is mollified.

::

“So, um,” Harry fidgets, when they’re alone in the corridor. “Are… are we really dating?”

Cedric laughs and pulls him closer. “Yes, we are.”

“Okay. Just checking.” Harry leans in for another kiss. “Wait. Then Cho isn’t your girlfriend?”

Cedric looks at him fondly and says, “Cho’s like my Hermione.”

“Ohhh…” That’s alright then.

::

“So does this mean we can cross Rule Number 3 off the list?” Ron asks.

Cedric furrows his brow. “What’s Rule Number 3?”

“Funny story about that, see, Harry was so besotted with you that he thought—”

“*OKAY, WHY DON’T WE ALL GO TO CLASS?!*” Harry intervenes loudly.

Needless to say, Cedric never lets Harry forget the amended Rule Number 3. *Don’t* Avoid Cedric Diggory. At all costs.

::

“…So do you want to meet my godfather?”

Cedric pales.

“Only if you meet my father first.”

They both shudder.

“I wonder if I can guilt him into liking me by sharing my tragic backstory with the Dursleys…”

“… This summer you are *not* allowed to go back to them. Nope.”

Harry can live with that.

He leans against Cedric as they go over their plans for the Third Task.

With Cedric, he can do anything.

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“Harry, have I mentioned that I Gryffindor you?”

“…”

“You know? Like adore? Grffin*dor*?”

“We’re breaking up now, goodbye.”

“Wait! Aren’t I Huffleperfect for you?!”

(He is. But Harry won’t admit that.)

Chapter End Notes

And then they won the tournament together and were disgustingly cute for the rest of their Hogwarts Years.

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Depending on interest, possible sequel Chapter 4 ideas: Cedric Diggory, Horcrux Hunter / Harry and Cedric Explore the Horcrux verse / In Which Cedric Learns to Keep Harry

Always happy to get Cedric/Harry prompts at my twitter, my writing tumblr, or my art tumblr

Thank you for reading my weird story :)

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